

Message Text

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SUBJECT: ALLEGED GOT HARASSMENT OF GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

REF: A) 77 STATE 269693 B) 77 ISTANBUL 3871

1. IN LETTER TO SECRETARY VANCE DATED DECEMBER 29, ARCH-BISHOP IAKOVOS OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA ALLEGES "VERY SERIOUS NEW HARASSMENT BY THE TURKISH AUTHORITIES AGAINST OUR ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE, THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCHES AND SCHOOLS AND THE GREEK COMMUNITY IN ISTANBUL."

2. THE ARCHBISHOP'S LETTER, IN ADDITION TO ALLEGING THAT ;HE GOT CONTINUES TO WITHHOLD PASSPORTS FROM "SEVERAL BISHOPS OF OUR ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE AND MANY TURKISH CITIZENS OF GREEK DESCENT" (REFS), CHARGES NEW GOT HARASSMENT IN THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FORM OF "BURDENSOME" TAXES ON GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCHES AND SCHOOLS. THESE TAXES ARE ALLEGEDLY AIMED AT FORCING THOSE INSTITUTIONS TO CLOSE. THE ARCHBISHOP CITED AS AN EXAMPLE THE CASE OF THE ZAPPEION SCHOOL FOR GIRLS, WHICH RECENTLY WAS FACED WITH A REAL ESTATE TAX OF "MILLIONS OF LIRAS" WHEN IT WAS RECLASSIFIED AS A "PRIVATE SCHOOL."

3. FYI: ON JANUARY 12 TURKISH EMBASSY PROVIDED DEPT

WITH FOLLOWING INFORMATION ON THIS ISSUE.

BEGIN QUOTE: (A) ACCORDING TO A NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE, PRIMATE OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH ARCHBISHOP YAKOVOS HAS CHARGED THAT TURKEY PUTS HEAVY TAX BURDEN ON THE GREEK CHURCHES AND GREEK SCHOOLS IN TURKEY AND SEEKS TO OUST THE GREEK PATRIARCHATE FROM ISTANBUL.

(B) IMMOVABLE PROPERTY BELONGING TO THE GREEK MINORITY INSTITUTIONS IN TURKEY IS SUBJECT TO PROPERTY TAX LIKE ALL OTHER PROPERTY. THE BUILDINGS USED IN THE PRACTICE OF RELIGION, I.E. CHURCHES, ARE EXEMPTED FROM THE PROPERTY TAX. THEREFORE THE ALLEGATION THAT THE GREEK CHURCHES HAVE BEEN TAXED IS GROUNDLESS. THE PANAYIRA GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH IN ISTANBUL HAD HOWEVER BEEN ASSESSED A TAX OF AROUND DOLS 600 FOR A PIECE OF LAND OWNED BY THE CHURCH BUT WHICH IS NEITHER AN ANNEX NOR A PART OF THAT CHURCH.

(C) THE SCHOOL IN QUESTION IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE THE ZAPYON GREEK GIRLS LYCEE. THE PRIMATE CLAIMED, WITH REFERENCE TO A LETTER TO HIM FROM THE GREEK ARCHBISHOP IN ISTANBUL, THAT THIS SCHOOL HAS BEEN RECLASSIFIED AS PRIVATE AND IMPLIED THAT THE PURPOSE WAS TO TAX THE SCHOOL. THE STATUS OF THE ZAPYON LYCEE HAD NEVER MADE IT ELIGIBLE FOR TAX EXEMPTION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND WAS HELD LIABLE TO PAY TAXES LIKE ALL OTHER PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN TURKEY.

(D) DESPITE THESE GENERAL PROVISIONS OF LAW, HOWEVER, NEITHER THE CHURCH NOR THE SAID SCHOOL HAS PAID ANY TAXES YET, BY VIRTUE OF THE INTERVENTION OF THE TURKISH MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

FURTHERMORE THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN NECESSARY STEPS TO MAKE CHANGES IN THE LAW SO THAT MINORITY INSTITUTIONS OF SUCH NATURE MAY BE EXEMPTED FROM TAXATION IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

IT SHOULD THEREFORE BE CLEAR THAT THE QUESTION IS NOT THAT OF ANY OPPRESSION, BUT OF RECOGNIZING SPECIAL EXEMPTION FOR THE GREEK MINORITY IN TURKEY.

THE ALLEGATION THAT THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT SEEKS TO OUST THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH FROM ISTANBUL IS FICTION. END QUOTE.

4. DEPT ANTICIPATES DRAWING ON INFORMATION PROVIDED BY

TURKISH EMBASSY (PARA3 ABOVE) IN RESPONDING TO IAKOVOS BUT
WOULD APPRECIATE ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR COMMENTS
CONGEN CAN PROVIDE. VANCE

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